
NEWS From:

Congressman Mike Honda

FIFTEENTH DISTRICT - CALIFORNIA



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Rep. Honda Fights for Honorary Citizenship for Soldiers of Asian Descent Who Fought in U.S. Civil War

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 Prevented Citizenship After Civil War

WASHINGTON, April 2, 2003 — Today, Rep. Mike Honda (D-San Jose) re-introduced legislation in the U.S. Congress to confer honorary citizenship upon soldiers of Asian descent who fought in the U.S. Civil War. More than 250 soldiers of Asian descent served in the Union and Confederate Armies but were prevented from becoming citizens upon conclusion of their service, a right normally granted to foreigners who join the U.S. military. The anti-Asian sentiment of the era led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, not only restricting legal Chinese immigration to the United States, but also prohibiting those immigrants already in the U.S. from becoming citizens. Similar restrictions were expanded to people from India, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and other Asian countries. This legislation is co-sponsored by 37 members of the House of Representatives.

Soldiers of Asian descent who fought in the Civil War and were subsequently denied the chance to become citizens are worthy of being posthumously granted honorary citizenship of the United States,” said Honda. “These brave souls demonstrated great courage, and were ‘rewarded’ with sanctioned injustice. It is time to right a historical wrong.”

Honorary citizenship is conferred by the United States on rare occasions to individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to this country or to humankind. It is an extraordinary honor not lightly conferred nor frequently granted.

Following is the story of one of the soldiers: Edward Day Cohota of Company I, 23rd Massachusetts Infantry enlisted in February 1864. He saw combat at Drury’s Bluff, Petersburg, and

Cold Harbor. In that same battle, he saved the life of William E. Low, who had been struck in the jaw and rendered helpless by shock and blood loss. After the war, Cohota enlisted in the 15th Infantry, serving an additional thirty years on the frontier. Despite 32 years of loyal military service, Cohota was denied homestead in 1912, because he was not a citizen. Officials told him that he could never be a citizen. Cohota, however, did not hold ill will toward the country that had denied him citizenship. In fact, the man stood with his hat off at attention, with reverence and respect as the flag was lowered each evening until his death in 1935.